

## THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECT CLAUSES VERSUS COMPLEMENT CLAUSES IN PERSIAN

### SUMMARY

The basis for the present study is the ‘degree of identificatory force’ according to P.F. Strawson’s definition provided in his *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*.

The author ‘revisits’ first the problem of the subject and predicate in Persian in simple sentences. Then he proceeds to the analysis of rare subordinate predicative clauses. Examples are given from Persian, English and Polish.

The predicative noun is normally more general than the subject. However, in the case where the predicative is represented by a clause, one can sometimes hesitate which is the subject and which is the predicate because either their more definite or more general status may be difficult to determine.

### I

Before we proceed to the analysis of Persian subject clauses as opposed to complement (predicative) clauses<sup>1</sup> we must first decide if the distinction between subject and predicative noun is based on the word order criterion only (subject preceding predicate) or whether we are dealing here with a substantial difference in grammatical meaning.

In the first case we would confront a situation comparable with the mathematical equation  $X = Y$  ( $X$  is  $Y$ ) being the same as  $Y = X$  ( $Y$  is  $X$ ). In fact, in the following sentences we can reverse the word order of both nouns without a (sensible) difference in meaning:

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<sup>1</sup> D. Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, Cambridge University Press, USA, 1995, p. 226.

[English-1] *A car is an automobile. = An automobile is a car.*

[E-2] *A sleuth is a detective. = A detective is a sleuth.*

[Persian-1] *Tâjêr bâzargân ast. = Bâzargân tâjêr ast.*

تاجر بازرگان است

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This is possible because both nouns in each sentence are synonyms. One can state that in such cases the opposition between subject and subject complement (predicative noun) is cancelled. We assume that the first noun will be qualified as the subject, the second one will be called its complement<sup>2</sup> or predicative noun<sup>3</sup> or subject predicative (function).<sup>4</sup>

Let us compare the above material with another sentence:

[E-3] *Time is money.*

Does it represent the same type of sentence as we had in *A car is an automobile* and *A sleuth is a detective*? Can we say: *Money is time*? No! Why? Because someone who has time can do something (during the time he/she disposes of) to earn money. But the opposite is not true: someone who has money cannot always save time or put it back in order to become ... younger (by paying money to somebody). So we rather have here the pattern: *X is like Y (in some aspects)* but not: *X is Y*.

The specificity of sentences like *Time is money* consists not only in their metaphorical meaning (we just compare time with money without stating that both are full synonyms). Equally or perhaps even more important is the 'degree of identificatory force' as we learn from P.F. Strawson's classic study: *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*.<sup>5</sup> Let us quote here his full explanation: following the concept mentioned above: 'I shall say that in any singular sentence of the class we are concerned with, in which two terms are coupled, one in subject- and one in predicate-position, the term apt for subject-position is, other things being equal, the term with the greater identificatory force.'

And which noun has a 'greater identificatory force'? The answer is: the one being the particular in question (the subject) as opposed to more the general concept being the predicate.<sup>6</sup> So, normally, in a sentence with copula (e.g. English *is*, Persian *ast*) containing a proper name it is the latter that functions

<sup>2</sup> *Subject complement* (Crystal, op. cit., p. 221).

<sup>3</sup> Compare: E.S.C. Weiner and J.M. Hawkins, *The Oxford Guide to the English Language*, Oxford University Press 1984, p. XXII.

<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford English Grammar* (Sidney Greenbaum, in memoriam), Oxford University Press 1996, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> P.F. Strawson, *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*, London 1974, p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

as the subject. In a more simple way we would say: the person (or thing) whom (or what) we are talking about in the sentence is its subject, e.g.:

[E-4] *Peter is a student* (and not: *A student is Peter*).<sup>7</sup>

[Pr-2] *Parviz šâgerd ast* (and not: *Šâgerd Parviz ast*) پرویز شاگرد است

In Polish we are particularly sensitive to the problem as we use (in the literary high style) the instrumental case (and not the nominative!) for a predicative noun (subject complement):

[Polish-1] *Piotr jest student-em*

In spoken Polish we also can use the nominative preceded by the pronoun *to* (corresponding to the English *it*). Copula is omitted in such sentences, e.g.:

[Pl-2] *Piotr to student*

As the New Persian language has no case category the distinction between subject and predicative noun (subject complement) seems to have no importance. And so some Persian grammars identify subject (*nehâd/fâ'el*) with the first noun in a sentence, qualifying the second one as a predicative noun (*mosnad*). Let us look at the grammatical interpretation of a short dialogue:

[Pr-3] *Âqâ! Hoseyn-e Ehsâni to-y-i? – Âri, Hoseyn-e Ehsâni man am.*

آقا حسین احسانی تویی

آری حسین احسانی منم

(= 'Hello, are you Mr Hoseyn Ehsani? – Yes, I am Hoseyn Ehsani')

given by H. Anvari and H. Ahmadi-Givi in their book *Dastur-e zabân-e fârsi*.<sup>8</sup>

They qualify the pronouns */to/* (= English 'you') and */man/* (= English 'I') as *mosnad* (i.e. a predicative noun).

However an objection arises here: namely, the copula forms */i/* (= English 'are', sg.) and */am/* (= English 'am'!) occurring at the end of the question and the answer respectively are the second and the first person singular. They agree with the pronouns */to/* and */man/* and not with the proper name *Hoseyn Ehsâni* which, consequently, can only be the predicative noun (subject complement) in both sentences. And the pronouns */to/*, */man/* are their subjects having 'greater identificatory force.' The man saying */Hoseyn-e Ehsâni man am/* is speaking of himself as a person called Hoseyn Ehsani.

In addition, let us state that personal pronouns have 'greater identificatory force' than nouns (even proper nouns) because in a particular act of speech

<sup>7</sup> Such a sentence can be used, perhaps, in a theatre where *a student plays Peter*.

<sup>8</sup> H. Anvari and H. Ahmadi-Givi, *Dastur-e zabân-e fârsi 2 (virâyeš-e dovvom)*, Mo'assese-ye Enteshârât-e Fâtemi, Qom 1375 (1996).

the meaning of e.g. 'I' is more precise (= the person speaking) than a proper noun as several persons may be known as ... John Brown or Hoseyn Ehsani.

In the above examples ([Pr-3]) with the subject put immediately before the copula and not at the beginning of the sentence we have inversion aiming at emphasizing the personal pronouns /to/ 'you' and /man/ 'I', the normal word order in Persian being:

Subject + Complement (Predicative Noun) + Copula,  
in this case:

[Pr-4] *Man Hoseyn-e Ehsani y-am (hastam)*

من حسین احسانی ام

In English, too, inversion of the word order (Subject + Copula + Complement) is possible although not frequent. Interesting examples can be seen, e.g., in advertisements like:

[E-5] *This could be you!*

It is *you* here (and not *this*) that functions as the subject.

Sometimes inversion in Persian corresponds to the use of the definite article in English. Let us imagine, for example, a situation where a policeman comes to the scene of an accident and asks:

[E-6] *Who is the driver?*

The answer could be:

[E-7] *I am the driver*

In Persian the question and the answer would be:

[Pr-5] *Rânande ki-st?*

راننده کیست؟

[Pr-6] *Rânande man am* (with stress on /man/ 'I')

راننده منم

As in the Persian language, inversion of the word order is not unusual; we may sometimes really hesitate which part of the sentence is its subject. Here I would like to quote the sentence (found in a manual for Iranian middle schools) which made me 'revisit' the problem of subject and predicate, in fact, a complicated matter (compare the conclusion of the article on the grammatical subject written by S. Karolak in the Polish *Encyclopaedia of General Linguistics*).<sup>9</sup> Namely, I read:

[Pr-7] *Qahramân-ân-e ân dâstân-hâ jânvar-ân budand*

قهرمانان آن داستانها جانوران بودند

(= 'Heroes of those tales were animals')

<sup>9</sup> *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1993, p. 403.

Which words (phrases) are here the subject and which – predicative nouns? According to H. Anvari and H. Ahmadi-Givi the phrase */qahramân-ân-e ân dâstân-hâ/* ('heroes of those tales') should be recognized as the subject because it stands at the beginning of the sentence. I would rather think that the word *[jânvar-ân]* ('animals') is the subject, because 'animals' are concrete, physical beings whereas *[qahramân-ân]* ('heroes') are their abstract qualification indicating the role of animals played in (fairly) tales.

The word order should not influence here our assuming that animals are the subject of the sentence. The inversion took place here in order to create a suspension after putting the predicative noun (subject complement) *[qahramân-ân]* at the beginning of the sentence because what we expected normally in the function of heroes were rather men than animals.

The signal for special attention to be given to the analysis of the above example was to be seen in the plural form of *[jânvar-ân]* 'animals.' As a rule there is no agreement, in Persian, in number between subject and predicative noun (subject complement). The latter, if not followed by attributive words, always stands in the singular, e.g.:

[Pr-8] *Parviz va Širin šâgerd and*

پرویز و شیرین شاگردند

(= 'Parviz and Shirin are pupils')

In English the form 'pupils' is here an obligatory plural but in Persian the corresponding word *[šâgerd]* is singular. But if a predicative noun is accompanied by an attributive construction known as *eżâfe* (corresponding to the English *of*-construction) the agreement in number does take place, e.g.:

[Pr-9] *Parviz va Širin šâgerd-ân-e kelâs-e čahâr-om and*

پرویز و شیرین شاگردان کلاس چهارمند

(= 'Parviz and Shirin are pupils of the fourth class')

So, coming back to the sentence [Pr-7] we had no formal obstacle to considering the first phrase */qahramân-ân-e ân dâstân-hâ/* to be the predicative noun. On the other hand the plural of *[qahramân-ân]* indicated this word rather as a subject and not as a predicative noun as the plural in the predicate is rare and appears only when it is definite, cf.:

[Pr-10] *Parviz va Širin šâgerd-ân and*

پرویز و شیرین شاگردانند

would mean: 'Parviz and Shirin are the pupils' (spoken about in the previous sentence).

Interesting examples of inversion where a predicative noun precedes the subject are to be found in the Persian translation of the New Testament (as well as in the English version). In Matthew's text (13, 37–39) we read:

[Pr-11] *ân-ke bazr-e niku mikârad Pesar-e Ensân ast.*

آنکه بذر نیکو میکارد پسر انسان است

[E-7] = 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man'

[Pr-12] *va mazra'e in jahân ast va toxm-e niku abnâ-ye malakut*

و مزرعه این جهان است و تخم نیکو ابنای ملکوت

[E-8] = 'The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom'

[Pr-13] *va karkâs-hâ pesar-ân-e šarir and.*

و کرکاسها پسران شریرند

[E-9] = The weeds are the sons of the evil one.

[Pr-14] *va došman-i ke ânhâ-râ kâšt eblis ast.*

و دشمنی که آنها را کاشت ابلیس است

[E-10] = and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

[Pr-15] *va mowsem-e hasâd âqebat-e in âlam va deravande-g-ân ferešte-g-ân and.*

و موسم حصاد عاقبت این عالم و دروندگان فرشتگانند

[E-11] = The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

If we want to see how complicated the matter of subject-complement opposition may be let us examine the following example from Stanisławski's English grammar for Polish learners:<sup>10</sup>

[E-13] *The remarks that follow are a typical instance of his manner*

The sentence is reversible and can be formulated as follows:

[E-14] *A typical instance of his manner is the remarks that follow.*

English grammars (that of Stanisławski included) do not bother which phrase is here the subject and which is the predicate assuming that the first one (in both parallel versions) is the subject. But in Polish translation the subject is the phrase that stands in the nominative and not in the instrumental independently of its position:

[Pl-3] *Następujące uwagi [nom., subject] są typowym przykładem [instr., predicative noun] jego nastawienia.*

[Pl-4] *Typowym przykładem [instr., predicative noun] jego nastawienia są następujące uwagi [nom., subject].*

(Stanisławski's intention of quoting this example was to examine the opposition in number: *are* in [E-13] versus *is* in [E-14].)

<sup>10</sup> J. Stanisławski, *Gramatyka angielska dla zaawansowanych*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1951, p. 213.

English grammars seem to neglect in such cases the rule formulated by D. Crystal in his encyclopedia:<sup>11</sup> ‘The subject usually identifies the theme or topic of the clause.’ What we are talking about in the above sentence is: *the remarks that follow*. They are qualified as: *a typical instance* (of someone’s manner). The subject is more ‘particular’ than the predicative noun. And the fact is indicated in the above quoted examples ([E-13], [E-14]) by the use of the definite article (*the*). Similarly, the predicative noun (by D. Crystal defined as ‘a subject complement’<sup>12</sup> is introduced, in the above sentences, by the indefinite article (*a*).

In Persian there is no definite article. A noun without any grammatical affix can indicate the particular (concrete) person, animal, thing, material or idea. At the same time it can have the most general meaning (the English zero-article like *in time is money*). Let us examine the following example from AZFA manual:<sup>13</sup>

[Pr-16] *Manzur az âmuzeš iġâd-e e’temâd be nafs va esteqlâl-e fardi dar kudak ast.*

منظور از آموزش ایجاد اعتماد به نفس و استقلال فردی در کودک است

(= ‘The aim of the education is to develop in children self-confidence and individual independence’).

According to both English and Persian grammars *the aim* is here the subject of the sentence. In Polish this is not the case. The word corresponding to the English *aim* (and Persian *manzur*) stands in the instrumental (*cel-em*) which makes it a predicative noun (subject complement):

[Pl-5] *Cel-em [instr.] wychowania jest wykształcenie w dziecku poczucia pewności siebie i niezależności osobistej.*

## II

Let us now proceed to the problem of subordinate clauses. *The Oxford Guide to the English Language*<sup>14</sup> defines a subordinate clause as: ‘a clause dependent on the main clause and functioning like a noun, adjective, or adverb within the sentence.’ This definition is based on the syntactic functions of the parts of speech (noun, adjective, adverb). Subordinate clauses functioning like a noun can be subdivided into several groups depending on what part of sentence they

<sup>11</sup> D. Crystal, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>12</sup> D. Crystal, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> Y. Samareh, Persian Language Teaching. Advanced Course (AZFA), Book 4, Tehran 1993, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> E.S.C. Weiner, J.M. Hawkins, op. cit., s.v.

are. For instance some of them can function as the subject and some others (rarely) as the predicate.

As far as the Persian material is concerned G. Lazard contents himself with the general notion of *proposition complétive*.<sup>15</sup> For him the following sentences contain a ‘proposition complétive’, no matter what its function is in the whole sentence:

[Pr-17] *Yaqin dâram (ke) šomâ fârsi xub harf mizanid*

یقین دارم که شما فارسی خوب حرف میزنید

(= ‘I am sure that you speak Persian well’)

[Pr-18] *Xub ast ke tašrif âvordid*

خوب است که تشریف آوردید

(= ‘It is good that you came’)

According to H. Jensen<sup>16</sup> the second part of the sentence ([Pr-17]) would be ‘Objektsatz’ (as it functions as the object for *Yaqin dâram* (‘I am sure’)) whereas the second part of [Pr-18] would be ‘Subjektsatz’ for it is the subject for *Xub ast* (‘It is good’). For G. Lazard both sentences contain just a ‘proposition complétive.’ H. Jensen distinguishes besides these two also ‘Prädikatsätze’, which we call here a predicative clause. Here are some examples found by H. Jensen in Sa’di’s *Golestân* (XIII c.) and in the grammar of Phillott:<sup>17</sup>

[Pr-19] *To ân nisti ke pedar-e man to-râ bâz-xarid?* (Sa’di)

تو آن نیستی که پدر من تو را باز خرید؟

(= ‘Are you not the one whom my father redeemed?’)

[Pr-20] *U tazkere-ye xod-râ gom kard ke xeyli asbâb-e zahmat barâ-ye u šod* (Phillott)

او تذکره خود را گم کرد که خیلی اسباب زحمت برای او شد

(= ‘He lost his passport, which caused him much trouble’).

In the first sentence ([Pr-19]) (whose subject is */to/* ‘you’) the subordinate clause is introduced by the universal conjunction */ke/* and anticipated by the pronoun */ân/* ‘that’ (as opposite to ‘this’). In the second sentence ([Pr-20]) the subordinate clause, introduced by */ke/* as well, functions as the predicate for the whole main clause (*/U tazkere-ye xod-râ gom kard/* = ‘He lost his passport’).

The third of H. Jensen’s examples has no conjunction:

[Pr-21] *To budi ruz-e eyd âmadi?*

تو بودی روز عید آمدی؟

(= ‘Were it you [that] came on holiday?’)

<sup>15</sup> G. Lazard, *Grammaire du persan contemporain*, Paris 1957, pp. 215, 218.

<sup>16</sup> H. Jensen, *Neupersische Grammatik*, Heidelberg 1931, pp. 278, 275, 277.

<sup>17</sup> D.C. Phillott, *Higher Persian Grammar*, Calcutta 1919, see: Jensen, op. cit., pp. 277–278.



According to H. Jensen, all the three clauses (in [Pr-19], [Pr-20], [Pr-21]) are relative clauses ('*Relativsätze*'). In my opinion they are introduced by conjunction /*ke*/ (omitted in [Pr-21]) and not by a pronoun. But in subject clauses pronouns can, in fact, stand at the beginning of the clause as in H. Jensen's examples:<sup>18</sup>

[Pr-22] *Har če zud bar-âyard, dir na-pâyad*

هرچه زود برآید دیر نپاید

(= 'Whatever occurs quickly, does not last a long time')

[Pr-23] *Na âref ast, ke az râh-e sang bar-xizad*

نه عارف است که از راه سنگ برخیزد

(= 'The one who escapes a stony way [i.e. difficulties] is not wise')

In the sentence [Pr-23] /*ke*/ is, in fact, a pronoun and not a conjunction like in the previous examples.

But the majority of subject clauses are introduced by a conjunction /*ke*/ which in spoken Persian can be omitted. The main clause is usually one of the following expressions:

[Pr-24] *Ma'lum ast (ke) ...* (= 'It is known [that] ...')

معلوم است که

[Pr-25] *Be nazar miresad (ke) ...* (= 'It seems [that] ...')

به نظر میرسد که

[Pr-26] *Xub ast (ke) ...* (= 'It is good / well [that] ...')

خوب است که

[Pr-27] *Momken ast (ke) ...* (= 'It is possible [that] ...')

ممکن است که

[Pr-28] *Momken nist (ke) ...* (= 'It is not possible [that] ...')

ممکن نیست که

Here is an example of a subject clause from Majidi's grammar (who does not mention predicative clauses at all:<sup>19</sup>

[Pr-29] *Ma'lum nist key bar-migardad* (= 'It is not known when he will come back').

معلوم نیست کی برمیگردد

Here /*key bar-migardad*/ 'when he will come back' is the subject and [*ma'lum nist*] 'is not known' – the predicate.

<sup>18</sup> Jensen, op. cit., p. 275.

<sup>19</sup> M.R. Majidi, *Strukturelle Grammatik des Neupersischen (Fârsi)*, Bd 2, Hamburg 1986, pp. 472, 476.

An interesting group of predicative clauses is to be found among definitions containing pronouns (or nouns in a pronominal function) that anticipate the subordinate clause, e.g.:

[Pr-30] *Bâzargân kas-i ast ke šoql-aš bâzargâni ast*<sup>20</sup>

بازرگان کسی است که شغلش بازرگانی است

(= 'A tradesman is a person whose job is trade'), cf.

[E-13] *A tradesman is a person, for example, a shopkeeper, whose job is to sell goods.*<sup>21</sup>

In such sentences the subordinate clause presents a description of the subject by means of simple words well known to the reader/hearer, opposite to the subject which is presumed to be unknown.

Here are some examples of predicative clauses found by the author of the present paper in the fourth book of AZFA manual (mentioned above):

[Pr-31] *Magar šomâ na-budid ke pošt-e sar-am mi-goftid: „Ân pesar-râ dastgir konid!”?*

مگر شما نبودید که پشت سرم می گفتید آن پسر را دستگیر کنید

'Were it not you that cried behind me: arrest that boy!' (p. 25)

[Pr-32] *Pâsox in ast ke dar jâvân-ân šur-o taharrok-o now-âvari dar hadd-e a'lâ vojud dârad*

پاسخ این است که در جوانان شور و تحرک و نوآوری در حد اعلاء وجود دارد

'The answer is that zeal, enthusiasm and mobility ... are typical of young people to a very high degree' (p. 131)

A fine English example of a sentence where both subject and predicate are expressed by a clause is:

[E-14] *What I say is what I think*

## CONCLUSION

In the above presentation I have tried to elucidate the opposition in meaning existing (sometimes) between a subject and predicative noun but I do not pretend to have solved the problem. I fully rely on S. Karolak's opinion expressed in his article on grammatical subject: 'a question arises if a structural definition

<sup>20</sup> Gh. Sadri Afshar, Nasrin Hakami, Nastaran Hakami, *A Dictionary of Contemporary Persian Language*, vol. 1, Tehrân 1373 (1994), p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> Collins Cobuild, *English Language Dictionary* 1987, p. 1551.

of grammatical subject that would have a universal character can be formulated at all.’<sup>20</sup>

I represent rather a ‘notional approach’ to grammar (and not formal) so I hesitate, for instance, to state where is the subject of the following sentence:

[E-14] ... *the result* [of a man’s behaviour] *is that he is thought to be highly intelligent*

The sentence was used by D. Crystal in his comment on so-called ‘intelligent echoes.’<sup>21</sup>

A Polish example illustrating a similar ambiguity is the following pair of sentences:

[Pl-6] *Pierwszy element w tym zdaniu jest podmiotem*

[Pl-7] *Pierwszym element-em w tym zdaniu jest podmiot*

Here the predicative noun characterized by the instrumental case ending *-em* is the word *element* in [Pl-7] and the word *podmiot* (meaning ‘subject’!) – in [Pl-6]. Both sentences are a translation of the English: ‘The first element in this clause is the subject.’<sup>22</sup>

The point is that limits of meaning separating particular noun phrases which can be a subject or a predicative noun in a sentence is sometimes vague on the grounds of differences hidden in the deep structure which may be difficult to grasp. For instance, it is possible to transform the following sentences:

[Pr-33] *Vazife-ye mâ in ast ke moqarrarât-e qânun-râ morâ’ât konim*

وظیفه ما این است که مقررات قانون را مراعات کنیم

[E-15] = ‘It is our duty to obey the laws’ into

[Pr-34] *Mâ bâyard moqarrarât-e qânun-râ morâ’ât konim*

ما باید مقررات قانون را مراعات کنیم

[E-16] = ‘We have to obey the laws’

In the Polish language the word corresponding to Persian *vazife* and English *duty* must stand in the instrumental case:

[Pl-8] *Naszym obowiązkiem jest przestrzeganie prawa*

We see that particular languages show substantial differences in syntactic structures.

<sup>22</sup> D. Crystal, op. cit., p. 220.

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